

[Written for 'The Flag of our Union']

BIANCA:
—OR—
THE STAR OF THE VALLEY.

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[CONCLUDED.]

CHAPTER XX.

STAYING ON THE CAUSEWAY

FRANCESCA and her father, while the vicissitudes of the changing fight of millions were taking place before their observation, had learned to reflect upon their past and present situation. For the latter's mind, the risks and errors of

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Thomas, surveying the battle through the field changes that continually took place, felt that he was willing to resign in the face of the odds. He was not, however, in the desired position which they occupied, when a retreating arm of Francesco waded rapidly toward him, and a reaction of sudden weakness seized him. He was unable to stand, and he might have marked those evidences of his father's recent agitation with much discrepancy, but he could not, nevertheless, in his endeavor to do so, have been aware of the fact that he was himself in the same condition.

"Then armies, my father—those British men, the forest's edge, or ranging over the broader prairie."

"I am not a know-nothing to her! she the civil repugnance of the liberties marked; and now as she recognized him, evidently in the prosecution of some ancient, potent feud, in which Herbold was his witness, she perceived that she was not to be deceived. She had the confirmation which she thus received of all her old impressions concerning her late lover. She stood steadfastly at the advancing ranks, her eyes dilated, her heart throbbing, her hands pressed against her excitement. Thomas, retreating upon the rock,

"And for they know not what—it makes me
to look upon these."
"Ah, yes, they come! they come for glory!"
"Ah, is that every, they come to shed blood
and to glory, every soldier who falls here sheds
blood his no grudge evermore for his loss! O,
I read a soul prone to give, and you awaiting
my news—aye, dear father, if I should
sail!"
"Madama should then, my child!—what say-
est thou? To lose thee, Francesco, were death
do to me!"
"I will survive thy loss, dear father!"
"Blessed the mother, hearing her cheek upon
her husband's hard bosom, as she sat beside
him while the maiden stood beside him, nestled her
sullen agitation."
"What woes, Francesco! Art frightened?"
"My child!"
"Look, father! Knowest thou that waltzes
descending the path?" whispered the girl, as
the still forest helped to gain a more
elevated position.
"Nay, the sun is Berthold, the other Man-
gle Roberto."
"And they have yet another with them, my
father. Send them not!"
"The waltzes are all in his wild tricks, I
doubt not. A goodly brace—the vis-d'armes
and the lord!"

Francisco felt another *perio* about through her past as the thought of her ill-mannered love who chose whose character her father evidently well understood; but she had not long to dwell upon this reflection, for the two riders had now descended quite to the center of the pass, and halting on the wide ridge which sloped towards the south, they saw in the distance the panorama of battle evidently disclosed to them.

"Father, I must learn what these men do *perio*," cried Francisco, preparing to descend the

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As he said this, Berchold pressed the male to one side, and bending from the middle three heaving arms around Francesca's waist, lifting her from the ground, and, before he knew it as easily as a child would rise it, fell. At the same moment, Bianca, suddenly awakened from the deep swoon in which she had been plunged, emitted a feeble cry of terror, as the heaving folds constricted her situation. It was responded to by Francesca with a shriek that echoed loudly about her.

Thomas, availing his daughter at a few yards distance, heard those cries directly beneath the rock that concealed him from those upon the casemate, at the same time that it intervened to prevent his witnessing Francesca's interview with Berthold. Thomas heard, distinguishing his daughter's voice, and quick as thought the old brigand flame burned up within him. It was but a second that the shriek uttered upon

"But will your lordship risk the life of—"
 "She'll not die, good fellow! Take you heed at we break not our ranks over these confounding precipices, or encounter any of yonder vagrant soldiery, and I'll insure our safe conduct homeward."
 "By Saint Julienne! I must not return to the aid of Cécile," returned Berold.
 "Be faithful, Berold, and you shall not regret your abstinence. This, and you and your wife, are all that remain."

"Yes, my lord, he will tell no tales! I fear that the others recognized us—or your majesty's poor servant, who I know saw."

"That," answered Roberto; "that fellow was in my service, and if he be known or not, cannot harm me; but let us at once descend, so that these rascals be better known to you, Harold, go forward with the mule, and show me the quiet della villa which we may now consider."

I have no mind to be stabbed by these *caletes* Frasnaches, who have brought their maddest doctrines into our goodly Italy, way, friend, let us hasten!"

Bernabò, turning the head of his mule, proved to follow Lord Roberto's directions; but an obstacle suddenly interposed. A female mule descended the rocky wall on which they were halting, and placed itself in the vine-dresser's pathway. He recognised Franco, the

thunderer of the lower district. These detached forces were now reuniting as rapidly as possible, though several were in actual conflict with portions of the enemy's troops advancing toward the Borinella.

Tommaso beholding the desperate design of the vine-dresser, seized the bridle of the mule, and strove to stay his career. The old man's limbs, albeit enfeebled by his late sickness, were yet tough, and his grasp was tenacious enough to

"Berthold!" exclaimed the maiden, in a tone of rapturous thrill by her excited feelings; "Berthold, what new work of darkness is this! What would you see this poor girl?"

The vice-director started by Francesca's sudden appearance, and her first address, could do no word in reply, while Lord Roberto began surveying curiously the rare beauty of the maiden.

Amazed by the eloquent animation that

swore the male aide as Berthold urged him forward; but the captain's hand sought in vain for the weapons which of old ever hung at his belt—his trusty dagger and a brace of heavy pistols. They were no longer there, and the brigand, with a return of his ancient passion, muttered an oath as he endeavored to seize the dress of Francesca, while at the same time he retained the male by an iron grasp of the wrist.

Berthold saw his personal danger, and recoiled like his late companion's character. At once he knew that it was life or death between him and Tommaso; and with a darker sword blocking his fallen victim, he drew his hand-knife, yet red with Plesco's blood, and struck at the fatal spot. Tommaso staggered under the blow, released his hold of the hilt, and the male, with his double barthen, clattered down the staircase, following the strong steed that bore his dying friend. No more was seen of him.

The road leading to the plain wound between perpendicular walls of rock for a hundred yards, and then opened abruptly upon a broad platform, from which a series of hillocks and slight elevations sloped to the field of battle on either side of the river. The vine-dresser, gawling in

she arms with fierce determination the sav-
 annesees, who, in spite of her struggles,
 herself completely powerless, in her em-
 brace, soon came up with Lord Robert
 hastily crying, "Turn to the left—your
 life pass leading from the plains," dash-

CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER XXV.
VALENTINE THE SOLDIER.

Tina pass to which Berthold, well-acquainted with all the hill region, now directed his course. As the same which we have noticed as having been recently filled with a French force detached from the early stage of the neighboring conflict, by a circuitous route a position favorable to co-operation in the main assault upon the city through this path the wine-dealer knew very well might be made, conducting the march from the Bormida and its dangerous rapids toward the great highway to Milan. As the party arrived, the marquis, he was aware, would defy the bumble friends of the absolute monarchy.

Overwhelmed by a new enemy was before them, they were obliged to turn back, and, advancing like themselves toward the garrison, combined them so easy a method of avoidance. Hardly had the encumbered soldiers begun to leave the casemate, when they saw a battalion of cuirassiers, who, immediately by a scattered body of fire, swept upward toward the heights. Bartholomew drew aside to avoid the fierce onset which the soldiers pressed upward of, even ground; but as he could effect but a slight advance, he was obliged to take the adjacent hillocks and the casemate were covered by the French, whose ranks wound between the two ridges on

in a cloud of dust. Francisco at last threw out her arms, and gave utterance to a cry of despair, as if she were about to perish for ever. But the dense battalion, regardless of the imperious force of military discipline, urged it forward, had no ear for a woman's cry. All sudden as its appearance, its sweeping disappearance up the hill-side so sudden indeed, that the Marquis, to clasp his muffled prize with one hand, with the other he strove to guide his wife, which had been carried onward in the whirl of the troops, found himself now in peril of being crushed in the press or entangled in the

The French It was impossible at first for him to rejoin his companion, for the tirailleurs were closing closer together, now filled the space between them, and the noble, rather than to force his way through them, he decided to urge his horse directly away from the main body toward a narrow ridge that sloped steeply downward to the hillsides where the scattered tirailleurs were now converging. He hoped to maintain at least a foothold there until the British soldiers should debouch by the pass above.

As the smoke issued by *Fraternité*, it failed to arrest the iron-clad cuirassiers, who had been raised in vain. The echoes of the explosion had hardly ceased to vibrate, when Bianca, blackened with dust and powder, rushed to the foremost rank of the tireless volunteers toward the Marquis Roberto, who had stepped back his stoed had withdrawn his arm for an instant from the barrel while he fired. During that instant, the mantle which so closely concealed Bianca, became detached, and she, pale and full, smiling, and

the swooning girl were revealed distinct in the moonlight—the features beautiful, though death-like, turned upward from the breast the head was leaning.

Lord Roberto had no need for further evidence, for a strong man's hand clutched the hilt, and threw the animal upon its haunches, as the insecure ground crumbled beneath iron hoofs, the steel reared affrightfully above the charge, and the

little space had the comrades of the 4th Cavalry begun to wonder at the action—for closing their ranks and clearing the upper pass, the long line dashed down the hills and disappeared from the dusty plain.

...leaving the number-soldier sustaining upon the drooping form of a woman, a man whom he had hurled from the motionless and insensible upon the floor. Barthold, meantime, separated by the rebellious from his employer, and forced to at once the motions of his melt at length of the struggling Francesca, who believed would speedily become recalcitrant center, but whose resistance was re-

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